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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: GOVERNMENT TELLS STAFFDEL LEWIS IT WELCOMES THE  
OPPORTUNITY TO DEEPEN TIES

REF: (A) Buenos Aires 168 (B) Buenos Aires 215

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Argentina MFA Chief of Staff D'Alotto and Sub-Secretary for Latin American Relations Colombo Sierra told visiting U.S. Congressional Staffdel Lewis on February 16 that it welcomed a perceived opportunity to deepen and improve bilateral ties at the outset of the Obama Administration. Both identified public security issues, particularly human and drug trafficking, as top concerns and areas where U.S. collaboration would continue to be most welcome. Colombo viewed the upcoming April 17-19 Fifth Summit of the Americas as important for Latin America, a chance for the region to register among U.S. politicians with a positive message. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) U.S. Congressional Staff Delegation Members Jessica Lewis, Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to Senator Harry Reid, and Caroline Tess, Professional Staff Member on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, called on Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sub-Secretary for Latin American Policies Agustin Colombo Sierra ("CS") and then with MFA Chief of Staff Alberto D'Alotto on February 16. Charge d'Affairs a.i. Kelly accompanied them to both meetings, along with Congressional Military Escort and Poloff (notetaker). The delegation called subsequently on Finance Secretary Lorenzino (reftel A) and met with a range of politicians and analysts from February 17-18 (reftel B).

¶3. (SBU) In both meetings, Lewis described the staffdel's overarching purpose as assessing the state of the broad bilateral relationship and considering what opportunities might be present at the outset of the Obama Administration. Both CS and D'Alotto described improved ties with the United States as important. D'Alotto said that the bilateral relationship had begun to improve at the end of the Bush Administration, but that the GOA was particularly enthusiastic about the prospect for better relations following the inauguration of President Obama.

#### Public Security and Anti-Trafficking

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¶4. (SBU) CS said that, aside from the effects of the global economic crisis, Argentina's most pressing concerns were public security concerns. Unlike the United States, which "has enemies," CS said that Argentina faced threats rather than enemies (except perhaps Iran, he said, referring to Iran's involvement in the 1994 car bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association, AMIA). He mentioned "trafficking" as the leading threat, then listed human trafficking, drug trafficking and contraband as among the dangers. He viewed the drug trade as most dangerous for Argentina and invited continued and increased collaboration with the U.S. to address it. Chief of Staff D'Alotto, similarly, emphasized these concerns and reiterated the expectation that this would remain an important area of bilateral cooperation.

¶5. (SBU) Speaking about public security issues in the Hemisphere, CS also pointed to Brazil with concern, noting that the GOB could not

entirely control its prisons, its gangs or security in the favellas, and that this could pose spillover dangers to Argentina. He identified security concerns in Mexico and Colombia as well, noting that this theme was increasingly important in the Hemisphere. Argentina sought to act against such threats at home early to prevent them from growing, he said.

#### Summit of the Americas

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¶16. (SBU) Both Colombo Sierra and D'Alotto told Lewis and Tess that the April 17-19 Fifth Summit of the Americas was an important meeting for the Hemisphere. CS noted that there were many high-level regional consultative mechanisms in which Argentina participated - "seven or eight, which is probably too many" - but that the Summit was important because it was the only one along with the OAS that includes the United States and Canada. CS recognized that Latin America received only limited attention in Washington and that the Summit was a critical opportunity to get on the agenda, hopefully in a positive way.

#### The Region: Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia

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¶17. (SBU) Staffdel took the opportunity to convey condolences over a fatal bus accident the day before in Haiti that had cost the life of one Argentine peacekeeper and left several others badly injured. CS noted that he was traveling soon to Canada to discuss the Haiti effort, in particular the Canada-led effort to enhance Haitian police capabilities and standards. Both CS and D'Alotto, separately, noted that Argentina had been under some pressure after Aristide's departure to reconsider participation in MINUSTAH ("some said we were doing the United States' dirty work," said D'Alotto), but that the GOA and partner Brazil had continued to see the mission as important and had persevered.

¶18. (SBU) D'Alotto expressed the hope that the Obama Administration would find a way to be more "flexible" toward Cuba. He described as important the incorporation of Cuba into the Rio Group and believed that dialogue and inclusion were important to encouraging reform. D'Alotto also urged that the U.S. end its "blockade" of Cuba.

¶19. (SBU) Both Colombo Sierra and D'Alotto described Argentina's relationship with Venezuela as important, saying that President Chavez had been forthcoming and cooperative toward Argentina. D'Alotto admitted that the GOA did not always see eye-to-eye with Venezuela on regional policies, but added that the opposition in Venezuela had made a grave error in not contesting congressional elections. President Chavez, he thought, would find it harder to sell some of his viewpoints with President Obama in the White House. CS said personally that he did not favor the idea of indefinite reelection of a president and had concerns about some directions Venezuela had taken.

¶110. (SBU) On Bolivia, both officials described Argentina's role as active and constructive, saying that the GOA sought to support a democratically legitimate government but also to encourage mediation and tolerance as the country addresses its many deep challenges. D'Alotto suggested that the 2008 UNASUR meeting in Chile on the Bolivian crisis had been a highly important intervention.

#### Global Crisis

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¶111. (SBU) D'Alotto underscored Argentina's view that multilateralism was critical now in addressing the deep economic challenges facing the world. The GOA was hopeful that President Obama's rhetoric indicated a U.S. commitment to multilateral approaches. The G20 would be an important vehicle for looking at the global financial and commercial system, and Argentina hoped that the USG would be supportive of a reform of the IMF to make it more effective and democratic in dealing with developing country needs. Finally, the GOA hoped that the USG would be "less dogmatic" in its approach to free trade issues, recognizing that a country such as Argentina required some protection for certain industries.

¶112. (SBU) Comment: The GOA MFA is projecting a very positive message about collaboration with the USG and was clearly pleased to convey

this through the Staffdel.

113. (U) Staffdel reviewed this cable.

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